



## State of Utah

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#### NEWS RELEASE

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August 17, 2006

#### A NEW ERA IN RANGELAND FIRES

Salt Lake City, Utah - The wild fires that have rampaged through Utah during the past several years are not supposed to be a yearly event. That's according to Dick Buehler, deputy director of the State Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands. "We are in a new era in rangeland fires," said Buehler. "These kinds of fires used to occur every 10, 20 or 30 years. But so much land has been taken over by cheat grass that numerous massive fires are sparked every year."

Cheat grass is a non-native plant. It germinates quickly in the spring, grows and dies rapidly, leaving a very dry and highly flammable stalk. The cheat grass chokes out slower growing, more productive plants that better protect the watershed and are not as prone to burn.

So far in 2006, there have been dozens of rangeland fires in Utah, burning tens of thousands of acres and costing taxpayers millions of dollars to fight and the meter continues to run. "We'd rather be spending that money to reclaim the land to its natural state without the cheat grass," said Buehler. The Division received about \$1-million this fiscal year to restore rangelands to their natural state. Costs to restore one acre of land currently run between \$61.00 per acre to \$155.00 per acre.

Cheat grass is a growing problem throughout the western United States. It's estimated that cheat grass overtakes about 4,000 acres per day. "It may be years until we get the cheat grass under control," said Buehler. "In the meantime, we will continue to be beset by the cost of fighting these range fires."

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